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Historicizing Security – Entering the Conspiracy Dispositive

Beatrice de Graaf & Cornel Zwierlein *

Abstract: »Die Historisierung von Sicherheit – Ein Versuch zur Einführung des Verschwörungsdispositivs«. This introduction offers a brief historiographic account on current histories of security. A case is made for historians to rely more on and profit from recent theories and concepts in political science, most notably the concepts invented by the Copenhagen School on securitization. Furthermore, an attempt is made to 'historicize security' and provide some new methodological perspectives, in particular the idea of connecting security to conspiracy as an operational dispositive for analyzing instances of security policy making.

Keywords: securitization, security history, conspiracy, legitimacy.

1. Introduction

Security is not just the outcome of physical or political circumstances and incidents. People and organisations have to attribute meaning to those circumstances and incidents. They have to be incorporated into political, administrative and bureaucratic decision-making-processes and procedures. This may seem obvious. But the history of security is usually not described in these terms. Histories of conflict and security usually focus on the key moments of change in the development of security-policy; without taking into account how complex the development process actually was. Another question that is often sidestepped is the question if those new laws, measures and organisations could have taken a different shape.

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To clarify in what direction this Special Issue on security and conspiracy is geared, we will start with a brief historiographic account on current histories of security. Next, we will shortly touch upon how history can profit from recent theories and concepts in political science. In doing so, we will attempt to ‘historicize security’ and provide some new perspectives, in particular the idea of connecting security to conspiracy as an operational dispositive.

2. State of Art in the History of Security

Since the 19th century the political sciences and criminal sciences have defined their research field as the domain of securing the “public order” and protecting society against violence and criminality (Cohen 1985; Foucault 1991; Garland 2002; Härter 2010; Jaschke 1991; Lange 1999; Lange, Ohly and Reichertz 2009). Security is a concept long associated solely with notions of national security, but in recent decades, the concept has emerged in social science as a more general concept denoting, on the one hand, objective and subjective safety in a variety of contexts and on various levels. On the other hand, it has emerged as a concept of governing (cf. Neocleous 2008; Simon 2007). Partly in relation to the recent publication of Foucault’s work on “security” in its 19th century meaning (Foucault 2004), security has become a concept guiding work in sociology and, especially, criminology. As Zedner (2009) argues, security is now a key concept to understand contemporary forms of governing in relation to a wide variety of social issues of which crime is only one example. Some therefore speak of a “security society” or of a related “society of control” (Deleuze 1995) that involves “hyper-securitization” (Dean 2007). Such perspectives indicate the relevance of security in contemporary social life, but they have as yet done little to promote the systematic empirical study of the process of securitization.

In the realm of International Relations (IR), Security Studies emerged as a social science discipline in the 1950s, focusing on protecting against external threats, border infringement, and military attacks (Frei 1977; Haftendorn 1983; Böckenförde and Gareis 2009; Haftendorn 1991; Buzan 1991; Walt 1991; Waever and Buzan 2007). Security and conflict have historically been key preoccupations of political science in general and its sub-discipline of international relations (IR) in particular. In this tradition, security threats are conceptualized as objective conditions of danger that require countering through rationally calculated state action. States are considered rational calculative actors facing an anarchic international system, where survival depends on conflict, bargaining, or cooperation (Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1979).

IR studies were embedded within the realist dictum and dogma of the “security paradox”: the dilemma coined by John Herz, according to which the one state’s striving for security inhibits the other’s, thereby inserting endemic chaos

and insecurity into the international system as a whole (Herz 1950). In this realist view on security politics, that prevails until today, security was often defined in an essentialist sense, as a natural, God-given order of things, of natural “statist” needs for autonomy and sovereignty, as mirroring national interests that could be computed by counting natural resources as compared to those of neighboring states (Krasner 1978; Smoke 1987). Since the 1970s, the concept of security was expanded with social, cultural, and economical notions, but it was still defined in a timeless, statist sense (Tuchman Mathews 1989; Mondale 1974; Myers 1989; Axworthy 1997). However, regarding contemporary security surprises, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, or the emergence of jihadist terrorism, (neo-)realist security scholars have been severely criticized for not having been able to predict these security failures (Gaddis 1992; Gaddis 1997; Lebow and Risse-Kappen 1995).

Only after the constructivist turn took hold within the IR field and the discipline of Critical Security Studies emerged in the 1990s was the concept of “security” increasingly seen as the outcome of a process of historical contingency and social construction (Waever 1989; Daase 1993; Katzenstein 1996; Buzan, Waever and De Wilde 1998; Weldes et al. 1999).

Even though the realist perspective was dominant within both political science and history, there have been critical researchers who viewed the concept of security from a non-static, non-realist/positivist perspective. One of the most prominent contributions to new ways of research in the field of security has been made by the German historian Werner Conze. In 1984, he published an important chapter on ‘Sicherheit’ in the influential handbook *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. According to Conze, the concept of ‘securitas’ played only a minor role in daily life during the Middle Ages. At that time, ‘pax’ was the dominant concept, which referred to a status of spiritual order and peace and which was related to a geographically limited form of territorial peace or security. Only after the Wars of Religion in the seventeenth century, security became one of the main arguments for the new modern states to expand and legitimize their reign and authority. The object of security-policy shifted from regulating personal relations and security (think of escort letters that medieval travellers carried with them to guarantee their immunity and safety from other landlords) towards a more territorial and geographical sense of security. From the eighteenth century onwards, society at large increasingly became the object of security policy (Daase 2012).

Besides Conze, the historicizing of security hardly developed in a theoretical sense. What did happen is that the concept of ‘risk’ took the center stage in the area of security-studies (Bernstein 1996). Nonetheless, the history of risk focused mainly on thinking about health and environmental risks and natural or technical disasters (Zwierlein 2011; Bennassar 1996; Favier 2002; Kempe and Rohr 2003).

The history of security in the classic sense received a new boost after the (social) constructivists gained ground in the field of IR. With the constructivists came the theory of Critical Security Studies in the nineties. Within this area of research, security was no longer viewed as a static concept, but as the result of a process of historical contingencies and social construction.

The critical turn in security studies from the mid-1990s onward substantially challenged the received notions of security within political science and opened up important new directions of research. The 1998 publication of *Security: A New Framework of Analysis*, by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde can be considered a watershed in this respect (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 212-18). This analysis points out that “danger” is not an objectively existing condition, but that “danger” requires social processes of mediation before it can become a broad societal concern, and before it becomes politically actionable. The “Copenhagen School” postulates security as an intersubjective concept that is called into existence by “speech acts” of relevant actors, be they authorities, parties, ministers, or other important figures. A security problem is perceived as an event or situation deviating from the normal order of things. If enough critical mass is assumed, the problem is operationalized into a policy and an encompassing series of action steps.

Here, security is reconceptualized as a “speech act,” the utterance of which is politically situated and the effects of which condition exceptional and sometimes post-democratic political responses. Through this process of securitization, the security problem is tackled or solved; institutions adapt to the new threat; or audiences just lose interest; or in the worst case scenario, the case is lost and a new reproductive structure emerges (Buzan, Waever and De Wilde 1998; Bonacker and Bernhardt 2006, 219-42). The interesting point for historians here is that security in this sense has undergone transformation; it has been turned from an absolutist entity or quality into a dynamic, communicational, and intersubjective process. Only when enough people agree on what constitutes a “security breach” does the process of securitization “work.” In this sense, the method leaves room for failing processes, processes of desecuritization, or even counter-securitization (Balzacq 2011; Conze 2012).

The concept of “securitization” signifies these broad social and political processes that make danger knowable and actionable. Thus, the securitization literature reconceptualizes security from a rationally directed state response to an objectively existing danger, to a socially embedded and historically contingent process of meaning-making and political negotiation (Waever 1995; Williams 1998; Buzan and Waever 2003; Buzan and Hansen 2009; Campbell 1992; Balzacq 2005; 2011).

This work can be seen as part of a broader reorientation of the discipline of international relations toward the study of social processes that construct security threats and formulate state interests and agendas (Alker and Shapiro 1996; Weldes et al. 1999; Neumann 1999). These literatures have successfully stud-

ied contemporary warfare as closely related to practices of “othering” (Campbell 1998; Hansen 2006).

The domain of critical security studies has significantly expanded in recent years, with increasing attention for the intersection between security and *risk* in state practice and policy making (Aradau et al. 2008; Amoore and De Goede 2008a; De Goede 2004; Amoore 2004). These literatures have questioned the dividing line between security as a practice focused on potentially existing threats to the life of the nation, and risk as a mundane technology of governing. They have drawn attention to the increasingly important focus on risk in state security practice; for example, in the operation of modern border security; the protection of critical infrastructures; the politics of the war on terror; and global processes of financial (re)bordering (Amoore 2006; Aradau and Van Munster 2007; Salter 2008; Kessler and Werner 2008; Lobo-Guerrero 2011). Others, including Peter Burgess, have explored how threat and insecurity are related to society’s values, ethics and lifestyles (Burgess 2002; 2011).

This line of research, which has received some criticism over the years, does offer some interesting links for historians, because the ‘Copenhagen School’ created a valuable set of tools to create a map of security as a dynamic, communicative and intersubjective process. Also, the theory (or the methodology of securitization) provides space for research into the questions of why the process of agenda-setting of security-issues works in some cases and does not work in others; and when can we speak of ‘counter-securitization’ or even ‘de-securitization’? When does security disappear from the agenda? Or how and why does security-policy create conflicting positions or even radicalisation of ‘securitized’ minorities?

3. Historicizing Security

For us historians, the value of both Conze’s and the Copenhagen School’s contributions lies in their call to view security-policy not as a ‘black box’, where only the outcomes are relevant, but to devote our attention to the underlying processes: the historical contingencies, the public administrative, the political and the personal choices that lead to different policies in different countries in different times – even when threats and incidents are similar.

The downside of the ‘Copenhagen School’ perspective is that their research focuses mainly on the very recent present – and thereby it poses processes of securitization as something new and unique. Additionally, the theory of securitization runs the risk of becoming such a broad theoretical framework, that it is always applicable and thus rendered meaningless. Therefore, it is our task as historians, to take the ideas of the Danish and Dutch researchers, and use it not as a mandatory framework, but as a useful conceptual ‘tool kit’, in which all

the individual parts of the process of securitization offer valuable insights for a more systemic analysis over time.

In this short introduction, we would like to offer two conceptual directions that can offer some valuable insights for the moderate constructivists among us and contribute to the historicizing security: the idea of the ‘security dispositive’ and the connection between this dispositive and the notion of political legitimacy. Historicizing security aims to place both the process and the outcomes of security policy in a historical context, and to deconstruct how these policies and ideas developed in debate, discourse and practice.

3.1 The Operationalization of Security Dispositives in History

To ensure a better understanding of the development of security-policy over time, we need a consistent working definition of security which can be further operationalized – contrary to other definitions. Such a working definition, which in my opinion does justice to the complexity and dynamics of security, has been provided by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. In the seventies, Foucault introduced the concept ‘dispositif’, as a means to gain insight into the practices of power and knowledge in modern societies (Foucault 1977; 2007; also Aradau and Van Munster 2007; 2011).

For Foucault, a dispositive is “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid” (Foucault 1980, 194). For Foucault, the notion of the dispositive was a way to grasp and analyze the ensemble of power relations at distinct historical moments, without reducing them to a fully coherent or overarching structure. The dispositive, moreover, is understood as a social formation that has “as its main function” at a given historical moment “that of responding to an urgent need” (Foucault 1980, 195). In this sense, the concept of the dispositive lends itself exceptionally well to the analysis of past and present security practice, which similarly sees itself as responding to urgent threats and fundamental societal needs.

The lens of the security dispositive brings into focus locally embedded security *concepts, practices, and emotions* that are invoked in the name of potential future threats. It makes it possible to identify and analyze the precise interplay of security’s administrative practices, legal categorizations, cultural imaginations, and calculative technologies, all of which are historically contingent. These dispositives comprise systems of relations that allow authorities and/or societies both to perceive and identify the security problem and to invent strategies to respond to it. As Foucault puts it: the dispositive “is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and

supported by, types of knowledge” (1980, 195-6). The unique character of security dispositives is their postulated urgency, immediacy, and inevitability, which is caused by the impending security breaches that are invoked and imagined. Security dispositives draw upon and produce specific forms of knowledge and techniques for anticipating, monitoring, and preventing alleged threats. Crime-fighting, critical infrastructure protection, as well as counterterrorism, are examples of such dispositives.

Security (and safety) can be defined as the anticipated state of being unharmed in the future (Schinkel 2013). Security is at heart a temporal notion because “security turns its eye exclusively to the future” (Bentham cited in Zedner 2009, 29). Security considerations and risk calculations are projected to the future, but have profound relevance in the present because future states of (in)security, of famine, drought, or war, are projected to enable acting in the present (Schinkel 2013). Thus, projected future states of insecurity or unsafety tell us more about society’s lived, existential worries, fears, and values *now* than about objective notions of threat and safety in a stated future. Consequently, in analyzing concepts and dimensions of security, it is not enough to concentrate on war and peace or on the presence or absence of threats in a given period. We also have to consider subjective and psychological emotions and expectations regarding security in a projected future (Kaufmann 1973, 156-69). At the same time, the notion of “war” has proven to be a powerful symbolic instrument to mobilize fear and anxiety and to prepare the ground for the adoption of exceptional security measures. The way in which the fight against terrorism has been reframed as a “global war” attests to this point.

Security thus has become a principle in governing and ordering society: this is expressed and captured in our notion of the security dispositive. Although its orientation is towards the future, and rests upon perceptions and imaginations regarding these future threats, its effects in terms of mobilizing governmental practices and expert knowledge and implementing exceptional measures are in the present. By historicizing security, it should be possible to unpack the dynamics, methods, and normative implications of security and safety on a conceptual level as well as through empirical research.

To be more concrete: we can trace the concept of security dispositives back to the discourses of ‘the fight against crime’, the ‘war on terror’ or – more recently – ‘child abuse’ and ‘cyber security’ – terms that refer both to concrete incidents or threats but that are also accompanied by prioritizing, politicizing, certain norms and values and new techniques and measures.

Historians in the field of security are often at work in the field of the ‘security dispositives’ of the modern state – as it developed since the 18th century. Modernity saw the differentiation and departmentalization of security policy into welfare policy, police, intelligence (*Staatsschutz*), and military and foreign security (Conze 1984). However, the main underlying security dispositive since

the 18th century can be defined as starting with the following elements that weave in and out and change over time:

- a rather spatial orientation (e.g., fixed on city, state borders)
- the territorial state brings with it the difference between domestic and external security
- a strong aspect of “taming the future” (Zwierlein 2010)
- the bourgeois society and community as actor and object of “security”
- values like order, discipline, commonwealth as to be protected
- new technologies (of information, construction, communication) that are perceived to enhance “security”
- security as process becomes the effect and the producer of frames of political action

Towards the end of the nineteenth century these security dispositives became engrained in the political game.

By using the conceptual tool kit provided to us by the Copenhagen School, the development and change of these security dispositives can be analysed over time. For example, if we look at the framing of church and religion as a problem of order and security the question arises: how is it that in certain periods of time specific religious minorities took centre stage in security-policy? Which risk-analyses belong to the security dispositives of the war against terrorism in the seventies or today? Was it the same for The Netherlands and Germany? Which actors had an influence at what time and why on security policy? Why did private parties gain influence? These days, we often talk about the commercialisation of security policy. But what about the arms dealers during the time of the Republic? Or the military-industrial complex of the first half of the 20th century? And how did ideas and opinions about what was being threatened change over time? Is terrorism a threat to the country, the society or the culture? Should the military protect our territory and borders or also ‘the public mind’? The ‘war on terror’ emerged as a new security dispositive since 2001, enabled by social media, and has led us to a new mode of security and risk governance involving techniques of ‘prepression, precaution and premediation’.

3.2 The Connection of Security and Legitimacy

This brings us to the second theme in this cluster. For an emerging security dispositive to become grounded, to become a tool of governance and to take hold over a territory, its inhabitants, and society, and infer itself in state bureaucracies, a sense of *legitimacy* is required. According to famous philosophers on the concept of legitimacy such as Max Weber, Seymour Lipset and David Easton, legitimation does not only comprise political and public support for the ‘system’, but also belief in that system and acceptance of its corresponding norms and values (Lipset 1959; Easton 1965). Legitimation is moreover

understood as a process of normative evaluation from which the “ascribed quality of legitimacy” emerges. The opposite, a back-and-forth process of contestation that undermines the existing legitimacy of institutions, is called delegitimation (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 112; Parkinson 2003, 184; Steffek 2009, 314; Van Leeuwen 2008). In “legitimatory statements,” statements are articulated that (de)legitimize a specific object of legitimation, drawing on specific “patterns of (de)legitimation” (Krell-Laluhová and Schneider 2004, 17). Legitimizing security measures, institutions, laws, or other security-driven activities, evolved in time, involved different discourses and spoke to different conditions. In what way were different security dispositives over time able to solicit and produce new forms of political legitimation, thereby presenting themselves as new ordering modes or principles for democratic societies (Zwierlein 2010)?

If we take “war” or “war preparations” as one of the classical security prerogatives of the modern nation state, and thus as a security dispositive, different attempts to legitimate war and its ensuing resources, funds, institutions, and organizational preparations can be identified. Leonhard made a first attempt in mapping and analyzing evolving patterns of arguing, legitimizing, and mobilizing for war in four western countries (France, Germany, the UK, and the US) in the 19th and 20th century. His dispositive of “Bellizismus” was legitimized by pointing to the perceived natural needs of the emerging nation states, mobilized by the metaphysical idea of a nation’s “manifest destiny” and thus in itself legitimizing the rise of the military-industrial complex as early as the late 19th century (Leonhard 2008, 148-9). Contrary to the security dispositive of the *ancient régime*, that, in its traditionalist and restorative sense, was directed along notions of tradition, order, sovereignty, and divine rule, new values of nation, *patrie*, constitution, and honor became operative, creating new types of warring societies and security regimes (Leonhard 2008, 187). Security-policy thus carried metaphysical meaning, according to Leonhard. The way this meaning was constructed, legitimized and spilled over into policy in a sometimes almost religious fashion differed per country over time.

For historians, it can be clarifying to trace the progression of security dispositives (or political agenda setting in the security-domain) and the processes of political legitimation belonging to those dispositives through time, by using the concepts mentioned in this introduction. Without turning history into a social science (and eroding its narrative-empirical base), concepts used in the social sciences enable us to gain a deeper insight into historical processes. The connection between security and political legitimacy opens up an interesting series of questions, for example those pointing to the creation and effect of conspiracy theories. Since security threats are likely to trigger processes of ‘othering’ and creating so-called ‘in- and outgroups’, and moreover feed on people’s needs to rationalize extreme misfortune or disasters happening to them, a threat very easily may slip into the construction of collective conspira-

cies. The hausse of antizionist conspiracy theories around 1900 or the emergence of conspiracy-theories after '9/11' underlines this point (Hofstadter 1996; Aupers 2002; McArthur 1995; Goldzwig 2002; Bartlett and Miller 2010; White 2001; Benz 2007).

3.3 Entering the Conspiracy

Thus, a very specific nexus between security dispositives and political legitimacy is presented by the conspiracy. The expansion, construction, consolidation and mobilization of security regimes in modern nation states are connected with the recurring theme of the 'conspiracy', as an essential rhetorical, practical and philosophical tool of legitimizing these regimes. 'Conspiracy' functions as a legitimizing argument, serving and fuelling a larger, encompassing security regime. For example, it offered the French revolutionaries a dispositive to frame and identifying its enemies, the corrupt elites, the old noblemen of the ancien regime and their accomplices, and to construct the 'referent object' of their security thrust: the revolutionary constitution and the 'sans culottes'. The conspiracy dispositive could on the other hand also be appropriated by oppositional actors, factions of parties to legitimize resistance to the perceived despotic rule that conspired to continue the exploitation and repression of the true 'people' and perverted the 'nation'.

Let me offer a brief note on conspiracy theories, as analyzed by political scientists in recent years. It can be conceptualized as a postmodern system of interpretation and signifying that is directly and inherently coupled with distrust against authorities, institutions and expert knowledge (Aupers 2000, 321).¹ Conspiracy thinking has its political dimensions (MacArthur 1995, 40-1). On the one hand, conspiracy thinking functions as a political mechanism for oppressed or disadvantaged groups seeking redress for their conditions; on the other hand, conspiracy thinking can be used as a political weapon by political entrepreneurs claiming to speak for a threatened majority. Those who feel negated by politics, or consider themselves to be insignificant, powerless and voiceless, find a powerful explanation for their feelings of unease in the rhetoric of conspiracy thinking. Goldzwig cites Mark Fenster (1991), who argues that conspiracy thinking is a way of becoming political relevant for those who have no access to traditional and formal political channels, or find politics incomprehensible and encircled with layers of secrecy. Especially political institutions and political elites are a grateful object and crystallization point to work of one's anger and discomfort (Goldzwig 2002, 496).

Conspiracy thinking can also have its effect on more extreme manifestations of distrust. Conspiracy thinking is integral part of almost every extremist ideol-

¹ We owe the paragraph on the nature of conspiracy to Jelle van Buuren, PhD at the Centre for Terrorism, who works on modern day conspiracy theories in the Netherlands.

ogy in which the legitimacy of the existing political and societal order is condemned (Bartlett and Miller 2010, 21; White 2001, 940). Conspiracy thinking is more than helpful in finding and localizing external enemies that can be blamed for problems that otherwise remain impersonal and abstract. Secret elite groups or under class parasites are believed to conspire in a bet to control history. Social conflicts are being simplified by attributing all kind of problems to demonized populations (idem, 954). Goldzwig argues that the popularity of conspiracy thinking is a sign of political disenfranchisement and can be the forerunner of violence (idem, 498). Acts of terrorism in the United States (the Oklahoma Bombing, de UNA-bomber, the Branch Davidians) for instance had political-ideological stamps, but also indistinct and paranoia motives that can be subscribed to conspiracy thinking and, for their part, nourished other conspiracy theories.

Rather than elaborating on this universalist, social scientist model, we like to bring the 'conspiracy dispositive' back to history, and to analyze it as a 'second tier' or functional 'sub-security' dispositive, encompassing both 'real' and 'imagined' conspiracies as historical forces (Caumanns and Niendorf 2001). Rather than attempting to discern between 'real' conspiracies and purported ones, we focus on its functional character in a given moment of time. On an epistemological plane, distinguishing between imagination and reality is impossible, since a conspiracy theory is preconceived to rationalize and integrate all cognitive dissonances into its master narrative, leaving no room for alternative explanations. Therefore, not the content, but conspiracy as a function bearer and legitimizing tool is being addressed here. The dawn of early modern history, beginning with Machiavelli already saw the rise of political theories on conspiracies, although in late mediaeval and early modern times, the *congiure* lacked at first the transcendental dimension (Fasano Guarini 2010, 155-207).

However, only after a modern approach to politics arrived, defined by a combination of both rational, 'worldly' components and non-rational, transcendental or even apocalyptic visions on society, the nation or the state, 'conspiracies' became an important political dispositive directing actions and planning. A first instance of operating conspiracy dispositives in order to serve political aims took place during the 'confessional age', when Calvinists and Puritans and to a lesser extent also Catholics adopted anti-Christian conspiracies to delegitimize the other confession's place in politics (Thorp 1984; Coward and Swann 2004; Bercé and Guarini 1996; Zwierlein 2006; Benz 2007). From that time onwards, conspiracies were common to modern politics, involving either 'counter-revolutionaries', 'terrorists', 'Jews', 'Jesuits' or 'Muslims'. In almost all instances, they served as a leverage and legitimizing tool to enhance and underpin existing or emerging security regimes. Or: to legitimize counter-securitization moves and resistance to securitizing agencies (Graaf 2012).

To summarize, without claiming to provide a full theory of conspiracy theories, modern conspiracy dispositives share a number of common traits, amongst which:

- Their attributive status: ‘conspiracy’ is predominantly attributed to historical actors or entities by others; hardly anyone would claim to belong to an ‘anti-Christian conspiracy’ (at least, without being tortured into admitting as much).
- Their purported transnational character: a conspiracy dispositive’s legitimacy is enhanced by pointing to the ‘alien’, ‘foreign’, ‘anti-national’ or ‘anti-patriotic’ components it harbours. Conspiracies thereby explicitly go against the grain of modernity’s differentiating character: conspiracies undermine the clear-cut labour division of domestic/external security
- Their epistemological impossibility: conspiracies are conceived as hidden, invisible, operating behind the scenes, along the lines of a ‘master plan’, a ‘dark force’ in the background. Everything that points to a more mundane explanation is re-written to fit into this preconfigured notion of the conspirational master plan, thereby ruling out any empirical, sobering approach to the conspiracy dispositive.
- Their destructive potential: purported conspiracies bear the grain of complete annihilation of society, the nation, the state of the political regime by means of infiltrating, subverting, infesting and infecting them.
- These traits also hold true, *mutatis mutandis*, if applied to the ‘counter conspiracy dispositives’, as arising from the heart of society and directed against the state or the ruling classes.
- However, notwithstanding the hybris and megalomania attributed to the conspirational threat, the dispositive also holds the possibility of its sudden revelation, its discovery and of nipping it in the bud – provided, the counter-conspirators or anti-conspirators receive full control and resources to make sure of that.

Both dispositives do need, use and feed each other:

- The state refers to conspiracies to identify and frame its ‘enemies’, mobilize support against them, vote for more resources to combat this threat and to legitimize adoption of new security measures and laws.
- Non-state actors operate the conspiracy dispositive with the same aim of delegitimizing the state’s rule and ruling practices.
- Both dispositives invoke a sense of urgency, immediacy and inevitability of a given security threat that calls for counter-activities that are framed as urgent, immediate and inevitable as the purported threats.
- Conspiracy dispositives also involve and draw on new informational, communicational and technical means to make visible and disseminate the ‘image of the enemy’ amongst the various constituencies. We argue that new conspiracy dispositives almost always also went hand in glove with the invention, application and professionalization of new new techniques of in-

formation, communication and transportation even in early modern times, that were inferred into existing security dispositives and gradually shaped and changed these.

4. Historicizing Security – A Methodological Approach

Security history can be written as a continuous rise, flow and changing series of security dispositives, operated and legitimized through a number of second tier dispositives, such as the stated conspiracy dispositive. Applying these concepts unpacks the development of modern developments of security history and opens a window on the changes in security thinking over time. Dispositives mark a contraction, often a moment in time and space, where new techniques, scientific methods, approaches, political constellations and outbursts of discontent weave into a 'heterogeneous assemblage of discursive and material elements to take on social issues' (Foucault 2004; Aradau and Van Munster 2008, 24), enabled through the discovery of industrial and commercial applications of new information- and communication technologies, used and embraced both by state representatives, commercial agents and 'security subject'/agents of insecurity.

With this Special Issue, we would like to introduce and to operationalize this new way of analyzing security history and to test some of our hypotheses concerning the history and structure of the two dispositives. We make the claim that modern security planning hinges on a new way of perceiving the proximate and distal context through new means of informational, communicational and technological means. The emergence of anonymous, free flowing news reports, through leaflets, diplomatic channels, public declarations and increasing new forms of 'journals' since the 16th, 17th century enabled a greater plurality of actors to participate in or receive knowledge of the process of political decision making. This communication or 'news' revolution (overlapping, but dissimilar to Habermas normative concept of the emergence of a 'kritische Öffentlichkeit') offered an anonymous representation of the contemporaries' 'world', which they could monitor and interpret as they saw fit.

This news revolution was a landmark in the development of modern political thinking (Zwierlein 2006, 198-294). It opened up the confined space and time of the local village or the individual court and enabled citizens to tune in into a larger community, it fundamentally altered the spatial and territorial landscapes of the early modern states, thereby also making deep inroads into the realm of security thinking. Modernity and the rise of the modern nation state on the one hand saw the differentiation and division between domestic and external security, and the professionalization and departmentalization of politics. On the other hand, the new modes of informing, reading, interpreting,

transporting and communicating enabled citizens to develop a bird's eye perspective on daily, or rather weekly or monthly, business of European politics.

This communicational dimension also was inferred into the security domain: producing, framing and identifying security threats went into a substantial higher gear. Conspiracy pamphlets, letters, texts proliferated through modern history, and went hand in glove with new representations of the world. The perception of the world as an interconnected, manageable space returned in exaggerated forms in the idea of conspiracies being able to operate globally, as being responsible for seemingly disconnected hazards and chances, interpreting coincidences as causalities. Conspiracy texts – either formulated by state security actors or by non-state actors – often interpret a sequence of actions (meetings of heads of states, military or diplomatic activities) portrayed in the media as symptoms of an underlying master plot, against which another master plot has to be put in action to neutralize the first one.

At the same time, as soon as the conspiracy idea was rooted and accepted by specific authorities, and possibly legitimized by the public at large, it easily dictated its own conspirational governance logics: leading to expansion of executive power, metastasizing bureaucracies and criminalizing suspect segments of the population.

In historical case studies on conspiracy as a modern day security dispositive, special attention thus should be devoted to

- 1) *The securitizing actors*. Who speaks security, who operates the conspiracy dispositive; which party, faction or organization wields enough power to persuade and perform its securitizing moves?
- 2) *The way the referent subject is defined*, e.g. how broad or narrow the conspiring circles are cast. Are they located in a specific gang, family, city or territory, or connected to a confession, culture, ideology, or even described in an eugenetical sense?
- 3) *The way the 'referent object' is perceived*, e.g. that what has to be defended and prevented from being threatened: what is purportedly at stake? Are vulnerabilities located along the territorial borders, do they regard the person of the ruler, the elites or is the national culture, cohesion and 'way of living' as such considered to be endangered?
- 4) *The conjunctures, flows and peaks of conspiracy communication*. When do conspiracy allegations emerge? How do new *informational, communicational and/or technological techniques* serve to enhance this conspiracy dispositive? We introduce 'technologies of imagination' (Schinkel 2011) – techniques, aimed at visualizing and representing the threat – as an important factor here. New means of gathering intelligence, of drafting reports and estimates do matter, as do the velocities with which arms carriers can be operated and transported.

- 5) And what *new modes of security governance* and risk assessment techniques are invoked, legitimized and deployed by the embracement of the conspiratorial threat on the agenda.

By answering these questions in different countries over different periods of time, and focusing on the specific sub-type of the conspiracy dispositive we are able to unpack the way security regimes change over time, thereby not only underlining but also operating the constructivist character of security and conspiracy politics in Modern History.

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